



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

History and Salvation in Lebor na hUidre

Toner, G. (2015). History and Salvation in Lebor na hUidre. In R. Ó hUiginn (Ed.), *Codices Hibernenses Eximii I: Lebor na hUidre* (pp. 131-153). (Codices Hibernenses Eximii; Vol. 1). Royal Irish Academy.

Published in:

Codices Hibernenses Eximii I: Lebor na hUidre

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

Publisher rights

© 2015 Royal Irish Academy.

This is an open access article published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>), which permits reproduction and redistribute in any medium, provided the author and source are cited and any subsequent modifications are not distributed.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

History and Salvation in Lebor na hUidre

Gregory Toner

Among the first things to concern the Irish when they started writing in the vernacular was the story of their own past. Interest in the past (as opposed to formal history) is perennial, and doubtless predates the introduction and spread of writing and Christianity in Ireland in the fourth and fifth centuries CE. The establishment of Christianity opened the country up not only to the concept of history, but also to an awareness of the history of Europe and the world as it was then known. At the beginning of the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea compiled his *Chronicle*, which presented a survey of the history of the known world, including in particular the history of the Jews derived from the Bible and the history of the Greeks and Romans based on classical sources. The second part of the work was translated into Latin and brought up to date by St Jerome, and his text established itself as the foundation for the medieval study of history. The *Chronicle* reached Ireland at an early date (Morris 1972), and it demonstrated to Irish scholars the need for a proper history of ancient Ireland to set alongside the history of other great nations.

However, the chroniclers' interest in the pre-Christian world is not purely secular. As Rosamond McKitterick (2006, 19) observes, 'The central strand in all these chronicles is the steady progression towards the Christian people, who form the principal subject of the end part of the story.' In other words, the story of the Jewish and pagan worlds that preceded the contemporary world is explored in order to illuminate the advent and ultimate

triumph of Christianity itself. Indeed, the very structure of the Eusebian history is Christian in its orientation:

The importance of Eusebius's synchronization of world history needs to be emphasized, for the juxtapositions, such as the fall of Troy and the downfall of Samson, or the careers of Homer and Solomon, or Deborah and King Midas ... are to be understood fully only in relation to Christian history. (McKitterick 2006, 14)

Within this world view, God reveals himself to his creation through events, and these events are recorded in history. God does not act arbitrarily in the affairs of the world, but 'manipulates every aspect of created order according to his eternal plan for mankind' (Patrides 1972, 4). Thus, history reveals God's plan for mankind, and to understand history is to glimpse the mind of God. Indeed, it is God's plan that gives meaning to history, and it was the medieval historian's task to reveal the working of God's will in time (Breisach 1983, 127).

Irish history dealing with the pre-Patrician period is located firmly within the Eusebian historiographical tradition, most notably in the structure and content of the story of the population of the island as recounted in *Lebor Gabála* (Scowcroft 1987; McCone 1990, 69–77). I will argue here that it is not just a concern with the historical fact of conversion, or even the victory of Christianity over paganism, that motivates the authors of the LU texts that will be examined here. Rather, many of the authors and scribes of the texts in this manuscript are specifically interested in the salvation or damnation of the souls of prehistoric kings, warriors and women. Thus, it will be argued that Irish history, at least as it is reflected in LU, is not simply a secular, dynastic project whose aim is to secure a place for the Irish among the descendants of Adam. Rather, the writing of history is a religious act whose purpose is to reveal God's plan for the salvation of the people of this island. Moreover, we shall see that salvation is a recurrent motif that permeates a large number of texts in LU, including both overtly religious and ostensibly secular texts, to the extent that it emerges as a common theme that binds these apparently disparate texts together as a coherent corpus.

The theme of salvation is prominent in several religious texts in the manuscript. Four texts are overtly concerned with the Last Judgement: *Fís Adomnán* (LU 1939–2301; Windisch 1880), of which A writes the first few lines before

Máel Muire (M) takes over, *Dá Brón Flatha Níme* (LU 1356–429; Dottin 1900) which is written entirely by M but missing the first few lines, and the two homilies in the hand identified by Duncan in her chapter in this volume as H4, *Scéla na Esérge* (SE) and *Scéla Laí Brátha* (SLB) (LU 2495–763; 2303–492).¹ In addition to these apocalyptic texts, the manuscript also contains other religious material which includes some content relating to the Last Judgement. Scribe A has transcribed a copy of *Amra Choluim Cille* (ACC; LU 292–1206) with copious glosses and commentary. While ACC is a tender elegy to the saint, it is also closely concerned with ideas of salvation. It opens with a plea to God not to be left ‘in the path where there is screaming’ (Clancy and Markus, 105; NIM REILGE I LLURG I N-EIGTHIAR, LU 497) and to protect the poet ‘from the fiery wall, the long trench of tears’ (Clancy and Markus, 105; DÍA MÁR MO ANACCOL DE MÚR THEINTIDE DÍUDERC NDER, LU 502–3). The poet is appealing from the outset to be spared eternal damnation and to be brought into the bosom of God where Colum Cille now rests. Colum Cille, he avers,

reached the apostles, with hosts, with archangels; he reached
the land where night is not seen, he reached the land where
we expect Moses, he reached the plain where they know the
custom of music, where sages do not die (Clancy and Markus,
107; RÁNIC AXALU LA ARBRIU ARCHANGLIU | RÁNIC ÍATH NAD ADAIG
ACCESTAR | RÁNIC TÍR DO MOISE MUNEMAR | RÁNIC MAIGE MÓS NAD
GENETAR CIUIL | NAD ESTET ECNAIDE, LU 687, 696, 701, 703).

The whole poem, therefore, is not just a lament for a dear, lost leader, but a reminder of how great virtue brings eternal reward. This echoes the text of SLB, in which the ‘very good’ attain heaven without the need for judgement:

*Buden aile im_ díb na dingentar do mes. acht ragait fo chetóir cen
mesrugud etir dochum nimi. 7 focraici fororda. Is leoside nach leór di
maith comallud na nn-erailend in scriptur díada forro do denam co
tuillet triana sualchib 7 triana caindu[thracht] féin sin. (LU 2390–3)*

Another group of them, however, will not be judged but will go immediately to heaven and [their] golden reward without being

¹ See Elizabeth Boyle’s chapter in this volume. I would like to thank the editor, the anonymous readers and Dr Jacqueline Borsje for many helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

judged at all. It is they who deem it not enough good to do what divine Scripture enjoins on them to do, so that they earn that by their own virtues and piety. (Mac Gearailt 2009, 98)

The *Amra* is followed by two poems in the hand of A, one put in the mouth of Colum Cille himself (*Dia ard airlethar*) and a prayer invoking the saint beginning *Colum cáid cumachtach* (LU 1155–206; Pokorny 1912). The latter is a plea for redemption in which the poet appeals for protection ‘from multifarious, very black, very severe beasts’ (*ar biastaib ilardaib | imdubaib imthennaib*, LU 1172–3), and ‘from fiery winds, from an unfamiliar path’ (*ar athchaib tennide | ar intech n-anaichnid*, LU 1180–1).

The extent to which the LU scribes have been concerned with eschatology and salvation has probably been underestimated by most modern scholars, whose focus has been primarily on the saga material. The religious texts have received much less attention than the bulk of the secular tales, with the result that our understanding of the scribes and their purposes has almost certainly been distorted. However, as I will now attempt to demonstrate, issues of salvation and damnation are central even to many of the supposedly secular texts, which exhibit in particular a grave concern with the contrasting fortunes of believers and pagans. I will argue, furthermore, that the scribes understand the tales within the context of the Christian notion of history, so that the concern with conversion was not merely an interest in the historical fact of the Christianisation of Ireland but was viewed as part of God’s unfolding plan for the Irish. As such, we must challenge the usual dichotomy between the sacred and the profane.

Sex Aetates Mundi

As it stands, LU opens in the hand of A with two avowedly historical texts: *Sex Aetates Mundi* (*SAM*; LU 1–172) and *Lebor Bretnach*, the Irish translation of Nennius’ *Historia Brittonum* (LU 173–291).² *SAM* is incomplete in our manuscript due to the loss of leaves. The complete text as preserved in other manuscripts presents a history of the world based primarily on biblical sources which covers the six ages of the world from Adam to Christ. It

² The copy of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* in Royal Irish Academy MS D iv 3 contains no fewer than six references to LU as its source, so that that quintessentially historical text in the Eusebian tradition must have formed part of our manuscript (see Oskamp 1966–7, 117–18; Carey 2009, 23).

is a fundamentally Christian text in the Eusebian tradition, therefore, and is supranational in that it is only tangentially concerned with matters relating to Ireland. The central point of the text is that it reveals the progress of time through six successive ages towards the redemption of the human race. It culminates with the Sixth Age, marked by the birth of Christ, and, as the author observes:

*Is tria Críst ro-génair ó Mhaire óigingin i tossuch na sessed aéssi ...
ro-saérait lucht na cóic n-aés remi-deochatar in cach n-immabus, ⁊
do-rochratar i nÁdam*

‘It is through Christ, who was born of the pure Virgin Mary at the beginning of the Sixth Age ... that the souls of the five preceding Ages who had fallen through Adam were delivered from transgression.’ (Ó Cróinín 1983, 95, §64, 130).

and again:

Ro-airg iarum iffèrn im dligthechu na cóic n-amser
‘He harrowed hell thereafter to redeem the righteous of the
five (preceding) Ages.’ (Ó Cróinín 1983, 96, §68)

Ó Cróinín (1983, 10) notes in his edition of the text that it ‘is not so much a work of “synthetic history” as a historical homily on the story of Salvation’. We must agree with his affirmation of the author’s concern with salvation, but it would be wrong to conclude that it is not also a synthetic history. As we have seen, Christian historiography is primarily concerned with salvation, so *SAM* is not one or the other but both. It is the revelation of the divine plan through history.

Scél Tuain meic Cairill

Scél Tuain meic Cairill (*STmC*) is begun on p. 15a, also by scribe A, and completed on an abraded leaf at p. 16a (edited by Meyer 1897; Carey 1984) by the interpolator identified as H1 by Duncan (this volume). The story tells of Tuán mac Cairill’s survival through successive invasions and so offers an explanation of how each invasion was known to the medieval audience. The story was absent from the earliest account of the invasions of Ireland as narrated by Nennius but was later integrated into the wider *Lebor Gabála* tradition, both influencing and being influenced by that core pseudo-historical text (Carey 1984, 98–100).

There are four manuscript witnesses of this text besides LU: Laud Miscellany 610, Trinity College Dublin MS H.3.18, the Book of Fermoy (acephalous), and Rawlinson MS B 512. Carey (1984, 95) shows that the versions of the text in Fermoy, Rawlinson and A derive from a common exemplar and that they are virtually in complete agreement. The interpolator has made several additions and innovations not found in any of the other manuscripts, most notably three interpolated poems, but his version shares readings with H.3.18 that demonstrate that it is, at least in these respects, older than A's text and its congeners in Fermoy and Rawlinson.

The interpolator's emendations show a particular interest in the story of salvation. The whole of page 16 has been erased and the interpolation begins at the top of the page with the addition of the first of the three interpolated poems mentioned above introduced by the words: *iss and sin ro radiusa na briatra sa sis*, 'It was then I spoke these words' (LU 1248; Meyer 1897, 296). Apart from the poems, the prose in LU is in almost complete agreement with Fermoy, Rawlinson and H.3.18, so that we must conclude that the prime reason for H1's intervention here was to add the poems.

The first poem describes Tuán's weakened state. The second poem is a lament, recalling the days when Tuán was a fair-faced warrior among the host of Partholón whose words and opinions were respected:

*In tan no bimmis n-ar dáil | oc cocert breth Partholain
ba bind fri cách na canaind | ba síat briatra firthadaill.
(LU 1299–302)³*

'When we were in our gathering, deciding the judgements of Partholon,
Sweet to all was what I said, those were the words of true approach.' (Meyer 1897, 298).

The poem adds little or nothing to the action, but the three poems together confirm that Tuán was respectively a stag, a boar and a hawk. As such, they may be viewed as corroborative verse (Toner 2005). It may also be significant that God is signified in the second and third poems as the instrument for Tuán's transformation:

domrat i ndubi ndecair | rí na nuli i n-ilrechtaib. (LU 1289)

³The meaning of *firthadaill* here is probably 'truly transitory' (see DIL s.v. *tadall* II). That is, although everyone welcomed his sweet words of wisdom, he sees now that they were of no lasting importance in comparison to the Word of God.

‘He has put me in wonderful⁴ grief, The King of all, in many shapes.’ (Meyer 1897, 298)

The third poem is the most clearly Christian of the three and we see here the purpose of the original composition or compositions. Tuán opens the poem by declaring that he is a hawk today and was a boar (*glasreng*) yesterday. He declares that his ‘practice of transitoriness’⁵ (*alaig utmaile*) is a marvellous thing which has been brought to him by God and he is grateful for it:

Ansu lim ar cach ló de | Día in cara rom cruthaige. (LU 1329–30).
 ‘Dearer to me every day, God, the friend who has shapen me.’
 (Meyer 1897, 299).

His good fortune stands in marked contrast to the fate of Clann Nemid:

Is sochaidi cland Nemid | can réir ruirech rigdemin
úathad indiu sil Sera | ní fétar cid fótera. (LU 1333–4)
 ‘Clann Nemid is a host [which is] without the rule of a
 royal-certain lord
 few today are the descendants of Sera | I do not know what
 caused it.’

The ‘descendants of Sera’ are, indeed, few as Tuán himself is the only survivor of the invasion led by Partholón son of Sera, as he is described here (see LU 1231). As the matter of this poem is situated in time after his transformation into a hawk, and thus after the demise of Clann Nemid, the ‘royal-certain lord’ of the first couplet must refer to God. Thus, it is evident that the enemies who relentlessly pursued him while he was alive have been separated from God as punishment and are now languishing in Hell. Tuán, however, has been spared for reasons unknown to him (*ní fétar cid fótera*). Their contrasting fortunes are further highlighted in the final stanza:

Ingnad ro ordaig Dia dil | mesi 7 clanna Nemid
siatsom ac reir demain dé | mesi is Dia mo chomarse.⁶ (LU 1341–2)
 ‘Wonderfully has dear God arranged me and the descendants
 of Nemed;

⁴ Or perhaps ‘terrible, grievous’?

⁵ Translations are my own unless noted otherwise.

⁶ Reading [i] *mo chomair-se*.

As a result, they are at the will of the Devil while I am with God.’

The three poems, while individual compositions with *dúnad* in each case, may be considered as a triptych or part of an even larger set of poems now mostly lost.⁷ Considered as a whole, the first poem sets out Tuán’s unfortunate circumstances and the threat to his wellbeing from the sons of Nemed. He dreads Scemel (*atagur Scemel sciathgel*, 1259) and Aindind will not protect him (*nimm ain Andind*, LU 1260). He prays to God for protection:

*Atát chucum a comdi cain | cland Nemid meic Agnomain
trén atat for ti mfolá | do chosnam mo chetgona.* (LU 1266–9)
‘They are coming towards me o gentle Lord, the offspring of
Nemed, Agnoman’s son || Stoutly they are lying in wait for
my blood, to compass my first wounding.’ (Meyer 1897, 297)⁸

Miraculously, he is transformed into a stag and is saved from his enemy.⁹

Thus, we see here that H1, in introducing these poems, wished to underline Tuán’s faith in God and that it was God who caused his transformations and thereby enabled him to live through the entire history of Ireland and to be saved. Of course, God’s purpose was not just to save a single soul, but to supply an authority for the writing of the history of Ireland and thus the revelation of his plan.

We are reminded here of *SLB* (assigned to H4 by Duncan—this volume). Elizabeth Boyle (2010, 39) asserts ‘that the central theme of the text is the role of Christ as source of ultimate justice’, and that the author describes the communities of the elect and the damned in terms of ‘citizenship’ of the *civitas Dei* or the *civitas diaboli*. This is precisely the bipartite distinction Tuán makes in the final stanza of the final poem in *STmC* when he says of the descendants of Nemed that ‘they are at the will of the Devil while I am with God’ (see above). Tuán sits in the presence of God, among the citizenship of his city, as it were, while his enemies who pursued and attacked him on Earth languish in the company of the Devil. Thus, we see the interpolators of both *SLB* and *STmC* expressing a definite interest in the protection God offers to

⁷ See John Carey, this volume, who suggests that there were four poems originally.

⁸ For Meyer’s ‘first wounding’ read ‘serious wounding’.

⁹ For transformation into stags as a means of escape see Carey (2013, 124).

his chosen ones and, more particularly, in the punishment of his iniquitous enemies.¹⁰

The failure of the Nemedian invasion, therefore, may be attributed to their iniquity. The main text is morally neutral and their demise is recounted without comment: *Dorroíbtatar side dano*, ‘they all died’ (Carey 1984, 101, l. 41). The effect of the poems, and of the last one in particular, therefore, is to introduce a cautionary moral into the account: the descendants of Nemed acted unjustly in their hunting of the favoured Tuán and consequently they were consigned to Hell.

Siaburcharpat Con Culaind

Siaburcharpat Con Culaind (*Siab. Conc.*) is written in the hand of M on 113a–114b but completed on a heavily abraded leaf (p. 115a–b) by H4.¹¹ The central theme of *Siab. Conc.* is clearly Christian, turning on St Patrick’s attempt to convert Lóegaire mac Néill to Christianity (Nagy 1997, 265–78). Lóegaire refuses to believe until Cú Chulainn is raised from the dead and appears before him (*LU* 9221–31).¹² The mere appearance of Cú Chulainn is not sufficient to convince the stubborn king of the power of God, however, and he insists on talking directly to him. Cú Chulainn exhorts him to believe in God and St Patrick:

*Creit do Dia , do náemPatraic a Loegairi ná túadaig tond talman torut
ar ní siabrae rodatánic is Cú Chulaind mac Sóalta. (LU 9301–2)*
‘Believe in God and in blessed Patrick, Lóegaire, lest the earth
swallow you. For it is not phantoms that have come to you; it
is Cú Chulainn mac Soalta.’

He reminisces on his earthly existence, recalling his victories and the adulation he received from his people. He repeats his exhortation to believe, asserting once more that he is no phantom (*LU* 9314–6). Lóegaire demands

¹⁰ Boyle (2010, 41) notes that *SLB* is particularly concerned with the terminology of justice, employing terms such as *mes* ‘judgement’, *smacht* ‘rule’, *recht* ‘law’, *riagail* ‘rule’, *gell* ‘pledge’ and *mesrugud* ‘moderation, adjudication’. It is perhaps significant therefore that the third poem in *STmC* describes *clanna Nemed* as ‘*can réir ruirech rigdemin*’. There are significant differences, however. Christ sits at the centre of judgement in *SLB* whereas, naturally, Christ is not mentioned in *STmC* but it is God who is the judge.

¹¹ The tale in its uninterpolated form is also found in Egerton 88, f. 14va–15rb and British Library Additional MS. 33993 I, f. 2v–3v (fragment). It has been edited from the Egerton MS. with readings from the latter by Kuno Meyer 1910b. A translation is available in Cross and Slover 1981, 347–54.

¹² Most of this is omitted from Egerton 88, which, however, clearly signals the abbreviation of a longer introduction: ‘*Luith Patraic do Temraig ,tl.*’ (*Serglige Con Culainn* 48.5).

that he tell of his great deeds, which Cú Chulainn consents to do. Again the hero exhorts the king to believe in God and Patrick:

*Creit do Dia ⁊ do nóemPatraic a Loegairi arna tudaich tond talman
torut. Doraga níba cumtabairt mani crete do Dia ⁊ do nóemPatraic ar
ní siabráe dotanic is Cu Chulaind mac Soaltai. (LU 9536–8; see
also 9314–6).*

‘Believe in God and in blessed Patrick, Lóegaire, lest the earth swallow you. It will certainly swallow you if you do not believe in God and in blessed Patrick, for it is not phantoms that have come to you; it is Cú Chulainn mac Soalta.’

Cú Chulainn’s repeated assertion here that he is not a phantom (*siabair*) is quite pointed. As Nagy (1997, 264) observes, the semantic range of *siabair* encompasses magic and distortion but Cú Chulainn is anything but that here. He is real, having been resurrected in body from Hell. In an inversion of the normal revenant motif, it is not his appearance that validates his story: rather, it is the veracity of his account that confirms the reality of his existence (Nagy 1997, 271). Only when Lóegaire hears the warrior’s tales of his own accounts will he believe that it is indeed Cú Chulainn. This empowers Cú Chulainn to undertake the real purpose of his return: to inform Lóegaire of the perils of Hell and to convince him that he should embrace the teaching of St Patrick.

Like *STmC*, the fate of pagan warriors is a primary concern here. Lóegaire asks Cú Chulainn to recount his glorious deeds of the past, which he willingly does, but in fact Cú Chulainn has been raised from Hell to tell the faithless king of the horrors of damnation and so persuade him to believe in God. As Elva Johnston (2000, 112) notes, the transience of earthly power and glory is emphasised by Cú Chulainn, who himself pleads to be allowed into the eternal kingdom of heaven. Cú Chulainn warns Lóegaire that the Ulster heroes, with the exception of Conchobar, are languishing in Hell (LU 9459–64). This clearly references another tale concerned with salvation, namely the story of the death of Conchobar in which he comes to the Faith on hearing of the death of Jesus on the cross (Meyer 1906, 4–21).

Having recounted some of his adventures, Cú Chulainn cleverly turns his recital towards a comparison between the pains of Hell and his earthly struggles:

*An ro chesusa d’imned a Loegairi | for muir ⁊ tír. ||
bá ansa damsa óenadaig | la demon co n-ír ...*

Immárubartsa in clétine | gai bolgae do léir. ||
ro bása i comchérbúaid | fri demon hi péin.
Bá comnart mo gaiscedsa | mo chlaideb ba crúaid. ||
domrimartsa in demon co n-óenmeór | isin richis rúaid (LU 9438–42,
9447–54)

‘All the tribulation that I suffered, Lóegaire, on land and sea,
more severe was a single night with the wrathful demon ...
I zealously plied the javelin on them, the *gae bulga*;
I gained complete victory over the demon in pain.
Powerful was my valour, my sword was hard,
The devil crushed me with one finger into the red embers.’

This effectively turns the accounts of his own earthly triumphs into a cautionary tale that illustrates the fact that not even the strongest warrior can overcome the Devil and that the most gruelling earthly trials are trivial in comparison to the torments of Hell. The tales of martial glory that Lóegaire was so keen to hear are thus undermined by the very hero at their centre and are subverted by Cú Chulainn to show that the greatest battle a warrior, and by extension a king (even the king of Tara), must fight is with the Devil rather than with earthly forces, however great they may appear at the time.

The text of Egerton concludes with Cú Chulainn’s final warning to Lóegaire to convert or be swallowed by the earth and the rather terse notice that this did indeed happen but that Cú Chulainn was released from Hell:

Rofiorad trath ini-sin. Doteachaid talam tar Laogairi ⁊ adfiadhar
neam do Choinchulaind. (Meyer 1910b, 56.23–4)
‘And that came to pass. The earth swallowed Lóegaire and it is
said that Cú Chulainn was granted heaven.’

H4’s interpolation in LU, however, adds a further statement immediately after these lines claiming that Lóegaire did confess belief in Patrick (*Ro chreti trá Loegaire do Patraic iarom LU 9540*). This clearly relates to contradictory accounts of Lóegaire’s supposed conversion, which go back at least as far as Tírechán and Muirchú.¹³ Muirchú tells us that Lóegaire converted following

¹³ On the various accounts of Lóegaire’s death, see Mac Eoin (1968).

an encounter with Patrick, whereas Tírechán states that he refused to believe because his father had forbidden it and that he had ordained that Lóegaire should be buried at Tara facing the Uí Dúnlainge graves of their traditional enemies at Mullaghmast, Co. Kildare (Bieler 1979, 86–98, 130–2). H4's text, therefore, appears to be self-contradictory as Lóegaire is swallowed up by the earth for his non-belief, just as Cú Chulainn had warned, yet we are told that he believed 'afterwards' (*iarom*). Seemingly, H4 attempted to accommodate the two different, pre-existing traditions by suggesting that Lóegaire was temporarily swallowed by the earth but survived to allow his baptism by Patrick.

The conversion of Lóegaire was clearly an important event for the interpolators of LU.¹⁴ Another text, ascribed to H5 by Duncan (this volume), which appears just a few pages later in the manuscript, recounts how Lóegaire held an assembly at Tara following his conversion by Patrick and the defeat of his druids (*Comthoth Lóegairi co creitim ⁊ a aided (CL)*, 'The conversion of Lóegaire and his death': LU 9732–820; Stokes 1887, 2, 562–7; Plummer 1883–5). The story, like the pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már* to which it is closely related (Carey 1994a), is primarily concerned with the establishment of authority among kings, judges, historians and churchmen, with the ultimate authority in all matters resting with the church. The opening of the tale refers to the contest between Patrick and Lóegaire's druids and the king's subsequent submission and conversion (LU 9733–40). Here, the matter of King Lóegaire's burial, which is problematic in *Síab. Conc*, seems to be avoided by suggesting that there were two Lóegaire's, namely the king and a druid of the same name. The relevant passage reads:

Ro luic dano in talam Loegaire druí tria brethir Patraic conid na chend chacait na huli coin tecait hi Temraig. (LU 9738–40)

'The earth swallowed Lóegaire the druid through the curse of Patrick so that all the dogs who enter Tara shit on his head.'

Nagy (2013, 184–5) suggests that the epithet *druí* here is more than a simple scribal error and may reflect confusion about Lóegaire's character engendered by persistent associations with other druids. It seems to me,

¹⁴ The centrality of Lóegaire in the medieval Irish historical schema is demonstrated by McCone (1990, 71), who notes that he stands at the intersection of the 'unbelieving' and 'believing' kings in the genealogies.

moreover, that the druid is a deliberate invention intended to reconcile the contradictory accounts of Lóegaire's inhumation and conversion. Apparently rejecting the possibility of temporary swallowing by the earth as perhaps envisaged by H4, the author of *CL* concluded that the Lóegaire who was consumed by the earth could not have been the king but was a representative of his, a druid in this case, who went by the same name.¹⁵ Thus, he dissociates the king entirely from the effects of Patrick's curse and creates a proxy for the pagan king. Elsewhere, Nagy (1997, 276) tentatively suggests that the king's burial in *Siab. Conc* is transformative and that when he rose again from the earth he might have left behind his pagan self. In *CL*, the author does not cleanse the king of his pagan associations as in *Siab. Conc* but rather he distances him from Patrick's ire by transferring his punishment to another character of the same name. Lóegaire no longer has to suffer the humiliation of the saint's curse, which is instead visited upon the druid. In *CL*, therefore, the pagan proxy (rather than the 'self') is entombed but the king saves himself by submitting to St Patrick. Indeed, as noted by Nagy (2013, 187), the druid's burial is closely paralleled by another Patrician entombment, that of the pagan idols of Mag Slécht who were also buried by Patrick up to their necks with their heads protruding. If, as seems likely, the druid Lóegaire was buried up to his neck, which is suggested by the reference to dogs defecating on his head, his remains became a monument to Patrick's overthrow of the pagan religion and the conversion of the king, Lóegaire, to Christianity. If this is correct, then we can see that the druid's remains provide testimony of this pivotal moment in the history of Irish Christianity.

In contrast to the view of Lóegaire's conversion expressed by the interpolators in these two texts, it is almost certain that Máel Muire held that the king had remained a pagan and that he had been swallowed by the earth. Although Máel Muire's text is now lost due to the work of the interpolator and his view of Lóegaire's death cannot be established with certainty, we know that the Egerton 88 version of *Siab. Conc* is elsewhere in close agreement with the text of the tale in Máel Muire's hand. It is highly probable, therefore, that Máel Muire's version of the text followed Tírechán in having Lóegaire die a pagan, engulfed by the earth.

¹⁵ The reference to Lóegaire's burial is absent from the Pseudo-historical Prologue of which *CL* presents a version and it is quite likely, therefore, that H5, or his source, invented the stratagem.

It is clear from the above analysis that the H-scribes accepted that Lóegaire had believed, however reluctantly, in God and Patrick. The significance within the context of this paper is that it is a key moment in the conversion story of the Irish. In the H-version, these stories record the moment at which the king of Tara adopted the Christian Faith and, contrary to the alternative accounts, was saved. The subsequent events in *CL* show a king struggling to come to terms with the precepts of Christianity, notably the principle of forgiveness. He tests Patrick's forgiveness by slaying his chariot-eeer and ultimately helps the saint to establish a secular law under Christian principles. The crimes of a guilty man were divided between church and state, with his soul being redeemed but his druidical alter ego condemned. Lóegaire, therefore, is depicted here as no less than the co-founder, along with Patrick, of a society in Ireland based on Christian principles.

Echtra Condla Chaím

Echtra Condla Chaím (*Echt. Condla*) was transcribed by M on pp 120a–b. There are clear biblical echoes in the story and there can be no doubt that the text as a whole is deeply influenced by Christian thinking (McCone 1990, 80–2; 2000, 47–119). Monastic authorship, rather than redaction, seems assured now, although perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the story is the way in which avowedly pagan symbols are manipulated by the storyteller to deliver a Christian message.¹⁶

The story tells how Connlae, the son of Conn Cétchathach, is wooed by a woman from the Otherworld and is eventually lured away never to be seen again. The woman was seen only by Connlae but the rest of the company could hear her attempts to entice him to Mag Mell. Conn, the king, appealed to his druid, Corann, to save his son. Corann chanted a spell and Connlae could no longer see or hear her. When she returned a month later, Conn once again called upon his druid to intervene but the woman interjected:

*A Chuinn Chétchathaig,
druidecht ní-s:grádaigther,*

¹⁶ So argued by McCone (2000, *passim*). Cf. Sims-Williams (1996, 190–1); Carey (1995); Maier (2013). Caroline McGrath (2010) argues that the apple that sustains Connlae while he remains in Ireland, as well as echoing the fruit of the Tree of Life in the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, probably references a native tradition with reflexes in many cultures.

*ar is bec ro:saig for mesu
artrag máir fírián connil
muinteraib ilib adamraib.
Mo-tub:ticfa a recht.
Con:scéra brichtu druad tárdechto
ar bélaib demuín duib dolbthig.*

‘O Conn of the Hundred Battles,
do no love druidry,
It is in a little while that the Great High King’s righteous
(and) decent one will reach your judgements
with many wondrous followers.
His law with soon come to you.
He will destroy the spells of the druids of base teaching
in front of the black, bewitching Devil.’ (McCone 2000,
175–81)

The striking image here is that the supernatural woman who entices Connlae to the Otherworld acts as a prophet foretelling the coming of St Patrick (the Great High King’s righteous and decent one) and that he will destroy druidry in front of the Devil himself. This is the central message in this short text, which is intended to mark the passing of the old order and the imminent arrival of the new. The message is made all the more potent by being delivered by a representative of the Otherworld who has taken cognisance of the way things are moving. It strikes us as very peculiar that an immortal pagan being should deliver this message, but in fact the medieval mind had succeeded by various routes in accommodating the inhabitants of the *síd* within its Christian worldview, whether it understood them as humans with magical powers, demons, ghosts, or angelic messengers (Carey 1999, 20–3; Borsje 2009, 53–82). Maier argues that the author is playing with the dissonance that he sets up here, perhaps for amusement but also to extol the new religion by making ‘the pagan king and his druid look like fools’ (Maier 2013, ???). The real aim, however, may have been more subversive than this, and I would argue that the fact that the prophecy of the end of druidry and the coming of Christianity is put in the mouth of a representative of the Otherworld is a deliberate act intended to underline the Christian message of the text. This woman from the *síd* could not only foresee the end of the pagan order but was seemingly

enthusiastically anticipating and endorsing the arrival of the new Christian order. Indeed, her espousal of the Christian worldview might be further underlined in the text by the fluid nature of the ‘other world’ to which she takes Connlae. Although she appears in the first part of the tale to arrive at Uisnech in the middle of Ireland and declares that she is a woman of the *síd*, at the end of the tale she whisks Connlae off to an overseas world which, as John Carey (1982–3) has cogently argued, seems to be extraneous to the tradition. We may justifiably wonder whether this shift in the location of the Otherworld is merely accidental or whether the author deliberately transferred Connlae’s destination (and destiny) from a pagan subterranean domain to a more overtly Christian, transmarine paradise. In other words, it is possible to interpret this apparent disconnect in the tale as a calculated rejection by the woman, and the author, of her native home in the *síd* in favour of a delightful land in which she and Connlae would await the Final Judgement.

The transient glories of this world are emphasised in other texts in LU as we have seen and they are again adverted to here, this time by the woman when she addresses Connlae during her second visit:

Nall suide | saides Connle | eter marbu duthaini | oc indnaidiu éco úathmair.

To-t-chuiretar bí bithbí.

‘Grandly does Connlae sit amidst the short-lived dead awaiting terrible death. The everliving invite you.’ (McCone 2000, 122 §9; 169–70)

Not only are mortals ‘short-lived’ and ‘awaiting terrible death’, they are already dead (*marbu*). The woman is offering him eternal life in a land where there is ‘neither death nor sin nor transgression’ (§3). Although this must be understood firstly within the confines of the narrative (the literal sense) as *tír inna mbéo*, the Irish Otherworld, we have seen that its nature may already have metamorphosed into a Christian paradise, but in any case it must be understood allegorically as the Christian Otherworld, heaven, which is described in strikingly similar terms in, for example, *SLB*:

Bethu suthain cen bas. nuall faelti cen torsi. slanti cen galar. óetiu cen sentataid. síd cen debaid. sáime cen dóinmige. saire cen sáethar cen sním. cen ocorus bíd nó étaig nó cotulta. (LU 2468–70).

‘Everlasting life without death, cries of joy without sorrow, health without sickness, youth without old age, peace without conflict, tranquillity without adversity, freedom without toil, without care, without need of food or clothing or sleep.’ (Mac Gearailt 2009, 103)

The implicit meaning of the fairy woman’s utterance is that those who live in this world, surrounded by pagan practice, are doomed to a painful death, whereas those who answer the call of the prophet and who believe will attain eternal life. Thus, this narrative, despite first appearances, invites us once again to consider the rejection of paganism and sin and to embrace the message of St Patrick.

Imram Brain meic Febail

James Carney argued as long ago as 1955 that *Imram Brain meic Febail* (*Im. Br.*), which is preserved only fragmentarily in LU (p. 121a), must be read as ‘an allegory showing Man setting out on the voyage to Paradise’ (Carney 1955, 282) As in *Echt. Condla*, an Otherworld woman appears to the hero of the tale, urging him to leave Ireland in search of a beautiful island in which there is no sorrow or hardship, no illness or death. In an extension of biblical teaching, there is not a single paradise located in the east but there are ‘thrice fifty islands far away | in the ocean to the west of us’ (Mac Mathúna 1985, 50 §25).

Fil and bile co mbláthaib | fors-ngairet éoin do thráthaib,
is tre cho(i)cetal is gnáth | con-gairet uili cach tráth ...
Ní gnáth ecoíniud ná mrath | i mruig deanda etargnath;
ní-bí nach guth garc fri cró(a)is | acht mad céul mbind friss-ben
cló(a)is.
Cen brón, cen dubai, cen bás, | cen nach galar, cen indgas:
is ed etargnae nEmnae, | ní comtig a comamrae.

‘There is an ancient tree in blossom there | on which the birds call the Hours || it is in harmony usually that they all call together every Hour ... || Not known is wailing or treachery | in the land of the well-known citadel || there is no rough or harsh voice | save only sweet music which strikes the ear. || Without sorrow, without grief, without death | without sickness, without debility || that is the sign of Emnae | not

usually is a wonder equal to this.’ (Mac Mathúna 1985, 34–5, 47–8, §§7, 9–10)

The Island of Women bears many similarities to the *terra repromissionis* of vision literature and ‘stands ready for the *boni non valde* prior to the eternal Judgement and subsequent transportation to the paradise of the World-to-Come’ (Mac Mathúna 1985, 282). Unlike other voyage tales, there is no overt Christian motivation of penance or pilgrimage driving the hero to undertake the perilous voyage, and the story, like *Echt. Condla*, is set in the pre-Christian past with no ecclesiastical representatives. However, the tale’s central concern with an overseas paradise that is reminiscent of, and perhaps even linked to, Paradise, must have been of great interest to Máel Muire.¹⁷ We witness here a meeting of two worlds, one material and transient and the other immaterial and eternal, such as we have seen in the case of *Echt. Condla*. As Bran moves out of our material world into the ocean, he encounters—beneath and alongside the material world—an immaterial one. Nowhere is the essence of the encounter more clearly depicted than in Manannán’s observation that Bran sees only water where he himself sees a flowering plain. As McCone notes in this context, our mortal hero is ‘unable to penetrate the surface of transient things to behold a deeper eternal reality’ (McCone 2000, 113).

McCone sees the voyage as ill-fated and views the story as a cautionary tale standing in apposition to what he construes as a positive paradigm of surrender to paradise depicted in *EC* (McCone 2000, 109–14). As such, the tale can be read as an allegory for the Christian journey to Paradise. However, as even McCone concedes, the allegory is not rigorously worked out in the text, and Mac Mathúna proposes interpreting the text in terms of similitude or, drawing on the lexicon of the text itself, what Mac Mathúna (1993, 341–5) has called *samail*, ‘likeness’. The text presents a set of parallels between this world and the Otherworld which abolish ‘the places proper to sea and land, they merge together on the same space, permitting coracle and chariot, wave and flowers, fish and calves and lambs to imitate and reflect one another’ (Mac Mathúna 1993, 343), but he extends the pairs to include the resemblance between the pagan Otherworld and Christian Paradise, and the Otherworld woman and Eve. This endows the characters and motifs of

¹⁷ Only the end of the tale has survived in LU (p. 121a).

the story with an integrity and validity of their own so that they are more than mere ciphers for Christian concepts. In other words, the Otherworld woman is an Otherworld woman, not just code for Eve, and the Island of Women is an Island of Women, not just a symbol of Paradise. The value of the concept of similitude is that similarities induce comparison between two worlds, as does allegory, but that differences are not to be considered as indications of the failure of the allegory. It allows for the allegorical reading of a text without having to assume it was written as an allegory in which every object and action has a meaning. *Im. Br.* is an exploration of a ‘pagan’ otherworld which casts light on the Christian journey to Paradise precisely because it is similar but different.

The tale seems to carry two specific warnings to the reader, cautioning against the lures of the Island of Joy, *Inis Subai* (§61), and attachment to this world as represented by the anonymous man who is enchanted by the former, and by Nechtan son of Collbran who is seized with longing for home and perishes when he touches the land (§§63–5). The Island of Joy, with its guffawing inhabitants, presents an almost irresistible attraction to Bran and his companions, and one of the men becomes marooned there having been assimilated to its mindless denizens.¹⁸ The implication is that the Island of Joy gives the appearance of a paradisaical land inhabited by happy people but appearances are deceptive. This is not the real Paradise but a poor imitation which can lead the unwary astray. As for Nechtan, he can be taken to represent the man who is overly attached to home, no matter how great the heavenly award that awaits him. People like that are destined to be mortal, to die and return to dust. Only by remaining true to the vision is it possible to gain eternal life in paradise. Even Bran seems to lose paradise. The woman warns him that they would regret leaving the land of women (§63) but he ignores her advice. After his return to Ireland, Bran set sail again but we are not told where he went (for that was not and could not be known). As Rekdal (1990, 10) observes, he was compelled ‘to go back into the

¹⁸ The inhabitants of the island are said to be *oc gignig ocus gáirechtaig* ‘gaping and laughing’ (§61). The first of the verbal nouns is unattested elsewhere and its meaning is in some doubt. However, the negative connotations seem to be confirmed by a very similar island that appears in *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin* on which, according to the prose, one of Máel Dúin’s fosterbrothers becomes trapped. The metrical version, which states that the three fosterbrothers were abandoned there, underlines their sorry state, asserting that their fate ‘was sad’ (*Trógh a n-iartaighi an trír brathar*, Oskamp 1970, 166 §31)).

heathen nothingness as there was no one at hand to save him by means of holy water'. Unlike the Christian pilgrims of later voyages, therefore, he was destined to remain in the void, seeking but never finding the Island of Women.

As elsewhere in the manuscript, therefore, the scribe appears to have pursued a keen interest in eschatology. *Im. Br.* provides insight into the nature of the unseen world, a counterpart to both the physical world and the Christian paradise. The modern scientific view of the world compels us to understand the fabulous events of the tale as fictional but it is very probable that the tale was taken by the scribe, and by many of its readers, as at the very least based on historical fact. Penitents in the early Middle Ages did undertake voyages over the sea; as Clancy (2000, 201) reminds us, 'the sea as a venue for repentance was not only a literary image but an actually existing fact'.¹⁹ The text asserts its own veracity through the account of Bran's return to Ireland whereby his story is heard from his own mouth and the poems are written in ogam (§66). The people of Ireland already knew of Bran's voyage and considered it part of their history (*Atá i ssenchassib linne chenaie Imram Brain*, §64) but Bran's return gives it the stamp of authenticity and validates it as true history.²⁰ How much stronger must the 'similitude' have been, therefore, if the tale's audience understood it not as mere fiction but as an actual event, the supposed factuality of which would have accentuated the intensity and significance of the underlying message? The tale being understood as history, the scribe could have believed that these events actually occurred and that the otherworld locations were not just imagined but actually existed. This can only have enhanced the efficacy of the similarities between the two domains.²¹

Aided Echach maic Máireda

Aided Echach maic Máireda is written entirely in the hand of H5 according to Duncan (this volume), apart from lines 4–18 on p. 40b, and both Imhoff (2008, 110) and de Vries (2012, 15–19) argue that the interpolator was the author as well as scribe of the tale. It is a compilation, combining the story

¹⁹ See also Bray (2000, 175), who allows for allegory to be based on at least the semblance of historical fact in the Voyage of St Brendan.

²⁰ On the significance of the eye-witness report in historiography, see Toner (2005, 77–81).

²¹ On the exemplary function of history see Poppe (1999, 48–51).

of the death of Echu, son of Mairid, and the story of Lí Ban, the mermaid who roams the sea for 300 years after the eruption of Lough Neagh until she is found and converted to Christianity by St Comgall of Bangor. Imhoff has shown that the text is primarily concerned with the baptism of Lí Ban. Her baptism falls into two parts: her immersion in the waters of Lough Neagh, which Imhoff (2008, 129–30) characterises as baptism by desire, and her sacramental baptism by St Comgall. The redemptive power of the sacrament is demonstrated at the end of the tale, where Lí Ban is said to have gone straight to heaven after her baptism (Imhoff 2008, 129). According to Imhoff, although Lí Ban has shown faith in God and has been saved from the flood, it is her baptism that grants her access to heaven, although we should not overlook the 300 years that she spent in the depths of the waters, which may have been envisaged as a period of purgation.²²

The process by which she attains salvation through baptism is of not insignificant interest. For reasons that are not specified, she was chosen by God to be saved from the flood, initially miraculously in human form under the lake but later transformed into a mermaid:

Blíadain lán trá do Lī Bán ina grīanān fon loch 7 a mesān inna far-rud and 7 Dīa oca anacul ar uscib Locha hEchach. Co n-érbairt-si i n-araili lō and: ‘A Chomdi’, for sī, ‘mogēnair no bíad i rricht na mbratān co mbeth sechnōn in mara for comsnām friu.

‘Lí Bán then spent an entire year in her bower under the lake, with her lapdog in her company, and with God protecting her from the waters of Loch nEchach. And she said on a certain day: ‘O Lord,’ she said, ‘happy is one who would be in the shape of the salmon so that she could roam the sea.’ (de Vries 2012, 215 §12)²³

God ordained that she remain under the water for a very long time:

Fota mo chomnaidi sund | amal rom-ordaig mo rí
‘Long my stay here, as my King has ordered me.’ (de Vries 2012, 208–9, §9(o))

²²Wiley (1995) also accords significance to the period of time spent at sea, which he views as the transitional phase in a rite of passage comprising separation, transition and incorporation.

²³Cf. *rom-anacht rí rethes ler*, ‘the King who causes the ocean to move has saved me’ (de Vries 2012, 206–7, §9(i)).

We might conclude that she was to remain there until the arrival of Christianity and the possibility of her baptism, but it is clear that her period of isolation has a transformative effect on her soul as well as on her body:

*Día mbá fo lind locha láin | im-rordus ríq ríchíd ráin;
ateoch in n-athair is náem | atlochor bráen batis báin.*

‘When I dwelt under the water of the full lake I reflected on glorious Heaven’s King; I entreat the [F]ather who is holy, I rejoice at the water of blessed baptism.’ (de Vries 2012, 204–5, §9(g))

It seems reasonable to conclude that it was the privations of her submarine life—the cold and isolation are mentioned—as well as the opportunity to reflect on God that enabled her to cleanse her soul, to want for God and to desire baptism.

Lí Ban’s salvation is noteworthy because she is born a long time before the introduction of Christianity, but there are other considerations that may have been of special interest to the scribe and putative author. As Elizabeth Boyle (2009) has shown, *SE* is particularly concerned with the physical resurrection of the body on Judgement Day, and in particular how those who suffer from bodily imperfections will appear, such as those with congenital malformations, miscarried children, and those whose bodies have been physically deformed in death, such as by fire or having been consumed by animals. This may apply to Lí Ban, whose body, when she is rescued and dies, is half human, half fish.

Conclusion

LU is the work of several scribes but we have seen here a persistent concern in a wide variety of texts with eschatology, and in particular the salvation of souls and the Last Judgement. In some cases the texts are explicitly religious, but in a substantial number of cases they are explicitly or implicitly historical. The pivotal event is the mission of St Patrick, which is identified in several of the texts examined here as the origin of Christianity in Ireland (for example *Echt. Condla* and *CL*). Pagans are repeatedly brought into contact with Christians/saints or other representatives of God, revealing the victory of Christianity and the subjugation of paganism. By the time LU was being written in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the need to defeat pagan ideas or prove Christianity’s superiority was hardly a real concern,

however; rather the pagans embody the evils of the world, illustrating what happens to those who lack faith or do not act according to God's will. Cú Chulainn's encounter with St Patrick and Bran's futile wandering in the ocean exemplify the importance of faith and the abandonment of worldly concerns if the soul is to be saved. In the story of Tuán mac Cairill, Tuán was saved through his own faith but his enemies, the descendants of Nemed, did not recognise God's favoured one and were damned as a result. Like Tuán, Lí Ban was transformed by God and allowed to survive long enough to be baptised. She willingly accepted her marine purgatory, imposed on her by God, and her soul was redeemed as a result.

For the LU scribes, these tales were to be situated within the Christian view of history. As far as they were concerned, the events that they describe actually happened, at least in their essence if not in the detail. However, the medieval theory of history was such that God's hand was detectable in the events of the past (see above, p.?), so that the concern with conversion and salvation revealed in these tales was not merely a result of their interest in the historical fact of the Christianisation of Ireland but was an integral part of a sustained effort to understand God's unfolding plan for the Irish.

